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What would you do if someone asked you, “What's the big deal about the resurrection?” That was the question a talk-show host asked a guest many years ago. The guest, a professing Christian, paused and hemmed and hawed and failed to come up with anything to tell the millions of people who were listening.

Yet the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is crucial to Christianity. Without it, the Christian faith would be futile. We would be spiritually dead in trespasses and sins and would be of all people “the most pitiable” (1 Cor. 15:19). Because Jesus lives, we shall live. For those of us who have placed our faith in Him alone for our salvation, death becomes the doorway to a wonderful, abundant life in the presence of our great God for all eternity. Christian author Josh McDowell called the resurrection “the most remarkable fact of history.”

In his autobiography, Just As I Am, evangelist Billy Graham wrote, “[Jesus] alone could say, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life’ (John 14:6). The proof of that claim is that Christ broke the bonds of death through His resurrection from the dead. . . . That sets Him apart from all other persons who have ever lived. . . . The resurrection also confirms for all time that Jesus was in fact who He said He was: the unique Son of God, sent from Heaven to save us from our sins.”

On April 21, believers will gather in churches around the world for Easter services to remember the great sacrifice Christ made for us. So we've devoted this issue of Israel My Glory to the resurrection. And if someone ever asks, “What's the big deal about the resurrection?” we'll all be ready to reply.

We also are delighted to run an article by Elwood McQuaid, former executive director of The Friends of Israel and retired editor-in-chief of this magazine. Elwood was at FOI Headquarters in August (that's a photo of us, top) to discuss the rewrite of his 1978 book It Is No Dream, which I recommend you get. He has completely revised and updated it, and it is the best book I've read on the history of the Jewish people and the outworking of prophecies that eventually will usher in the glorious future God has prepared for them. This book is timeless and a true keeper.

And to all our Jewish friends who will be sitting down to seders on April 19, we wish you a very Happy Passover!

Waiting for His Appearing,
Lorna Simcox
Editor-in-Chief
It was troubling to watch the video of Rafi’s Jeep going up in flames, the victim of an incendiary balloon launched in Gaza and carried by the wind into Israel. Within seconds, the entire Jeep was aflame.

Rabbi Shmuel Bowman, executive director of Operation Lifeshield, introduced me to Rafi three years ago; and Rafi has been a friend ever since. Thanks to generous donations to our Israel Relief Fund, we’ve worked with Shmuel to place 24 missile shelters in the region around Gaza to protect Israelis from missile attacks.

Rafi is director of security for the S’dot Negev region that encompasses 16 Jewish communities along the Gaza border. I once spent an afternoon in Rafi’s Jeep, driving through farm fields lush with crops, as he took me along the Gaza fence and explained the security threats.

It was easy to see the ever-present danger under which the residents of S’dot Negev live, day and night. We passed the exits of underground Hamas terrorist tunnels that originate in Gaza. Rafi had to keep an eye out for sniper fire. Nearby we visited an Iron Dome battery in the middle of a field—poised at all times to intercept missiles.

That afternoon, as he showed me the bountiful crops growing on the Israeli side of the border, Rafi told me that if I didn’t remember anything else from our time together, I must remember one thing: “The soil on this side of the fence and the soil on the other side of the fence are the same, but on this side we use it for good, and on the other side they use it for evil.”

I have never forgotten those words, and I couldn’t help but recall them as I watched Rafi’s Jeep going up in flames. Thankfully, he survived the attack unharmed; but the incident was yet one more witness to the evil Israel’s enemies perpetrate. Those who hate the Jewish people desire nothing more than to wipe them off the map, “that the name of Israel may be remembered no more” (Ps. 83:4).

The incendiary balloons and kites that Hamas has been launching into Israel since the middle of 2018 contain hot coals and are carried randomly by the wind until they land and set the surrounding area on fire. Thousands of acres of crops and forests, as well as several buildings, have been burned, putting Israelis at risk and destroying vital resources. Add one Jeep to that number.

Because the fires are often in fields or forests with no water supply and located a distance from any community, combating them requires firefighting water-tank trailers. The trailers have a great advantage over traditional fire trucks, which are slow and easily get bogged down in the looser soil of open spaces. The trailers can be brought to the fire site much more quickly.

Response time to a fire is critical. In the dry climate of southern Israel, where many of the plants have a high content of natural oil, fires become intense blazes within seconds. If firefighters don’t reach a fire within 15 minutes, it quickly expands exponentially and becomes impossible to extinguish. Left to burn itself out, it destroys entire fields.

So The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry began helping by sending funds from our Israel Relief Fund to Operation Lifeshield to acquire firefighting tank trailers. They cost $15,500 each and are the most effective tool to fight the fires. Each unit includes a large water-tank trailer, a motor to pump the water, and a hose. They are easily attached to pickup trucks, SUVs, or Jeeps like Rafi’s.

If you would like to help purchase a firefighting water-tank trailer, you may give to the Israel Relief Fund on our website at www.foi.org, or by calling our office at 800-257-7843 in the United States. Checks can be mailed to The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, PO Box 908, Bellmawr, NJ 08099.

by Jim Showers, executive director of The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry
They say the tip of an iceberg represents only 10 percent of its volume; the other 90 percent sits quietly below the surface. April 2019 marks 130 years since Adolf Hitler’s birth in Braunau am Inn, the largest town in northern Austria near the German border. He is forever remembered as the devilish dictator obsessed with the extermination of the Jewish people during World War II, and his name is stained with the blood of 6 million Jewish souls who were systematically murdered because of their ethnicity.

Yet Hitler did not invent anti-Semitism in Europe. He was merely the tip of the iceberg. The vast bulk of the insidious structure lies beneath the surface, which is why today’s Europe is beginning to resemble 1939 all over again.

Hitler tapped into the prevailing attitude in Germany at the time. In 1879, German politician and publicist Wilhelm Marr created the League of Anti-Semites to oppose the emancipation of Jewish people in Germany. Marr invented the word anti-Semitism. His publication *The Victory of Judaism over Germanedom* called for Germans to resist the Jewish people, claiming they wielded too much power in the world. Marr’s publication was so popular in Germany it was reprinted many times before Hitler ever stepped into German politics.

In 1894 Jewish journalist Theodor Herzl was so profoundly affected by the vicious anti-Semitism he saw when he covered the Dreyfus Affair in France that he became convinced the Jewish people were in danger. French Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a high-ranking Jewish officer in the French military, was falsely accused of treason. Following his conviction, he was marched before an angry crowd that shouted, “Death to Judas, death to the Jew.” Dreyfus was later exonerated, but the incident propelled Herzl’s mission to establish a homeland for the Jewish people.

Holocaust scholars agree that anti-Semitism reached a fever pitch in Europe between 1899 and 1939; and, unlike other minorities in Europe, Jewish people were targeted for their faith, race, economic status, and political affiliation.

A now-declassified 1946 U.S. State Department report, *The Jews in Poland Since the Liberation*, stated that hatred of Jewish people in Poland was embedded in the fabric of Polish political and economic life.

We might think that almost 75 years after the end of World War II, the European nations would have learned to protect their Jewish citizens to ensure a calamity like the Holocaust would never happen again. But according to a recent CNN poll, anti-Semitism is alive and well in most of Europe.

More than a quarter of Europeans believe Jewish people have too much power in business and finance. In Poland, 50 percent believe Jewish people use the Holocaust to advance their position, while almost 20 percent of Europeans believe anti-Semitism originates from “everyday behavior of Jewish people.” Sounds a lot like Wilhelm Marr.

Millions of Jewish people died horrible, cruel deaths in Poland in the death camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka, Belzec, Sobibor, Chelmno, and Majdanek. Yet today, 50 percent of the people in Poland believe Jewish people exploit the Holocaust. There are no words.

The steady, blatant rise in anti-Semitism should sound an alarm. History repeats itself, and European history has been anything but kind to our Jewish friends. If we’re sitting around waiting for another Hitler to come to power before we cry foul, we’ve waited too long. Remember, Hitler was merely the tip of the iceberg. We must never forget the 90 percent that lies beneath.

*by Chris Katulka*
I have set her [Jerusalem] in the midst of the nations . . . all around her (Ezek. 5:5).

The Israeli cabinet’s decision to accept a cease-fire with the Islamist terror group Hamas after Palestinians fired more than 450 rockets and mortar shells from the Gaza Strip into Israel within a two-day period set off a heated debate about Israel’s long-term strategy to bring calm to its southern border.

Since Israel unilaterally disengaged from Gaza in August 2005, Hamas has launched more than 20,000 projectiles into Israel, according to data compiled by the Israel Defense Forces. The missile barrage in November 2018 was the largest since Operation Protective Edge, a 50-day military operation launched in July 2014 to stop rocket fire from Gaza into Israel.

Since June 2007, when Hamas seized control over the Gaza Strip, Israel and Hamas have reached at least 10 cease-fire agreements—one truce a year, on average. Hamas is now believed to possess an arsenal in excess of 20,000 rockets and mortars of different calibers and ranges and is well-positioned to violate the current cease-fire whenever it desires.

Given the intractable situation, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has faced increasing pressure from hard-line members of his Security Cabinet for tougher action. Avigdor Lieberman, who has long advocated for a more decisive blow to Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the second-largest militant group in Gaza, has accused Netanyahu of “surrendering to terror” and recently resigned as defense minister in protest of yet another cease-fire. “We are buying quiet for the short term at the price of serious damage to national security in the long term,” he warned. Netanyahu defended the truce: “The leadership is doing the right thing,” he replied.

Most military analysts agree there are no good options for Gaza: Either Israel makes concessions to Hamas, which would embolden the group to make greater demands; or it annihilates Hamas, which would lead to a collapse of the Gaza Strip and create a power vacuum that likely would be filled by other jihadi groups; or it reoccupies the Gaza Strip, which would leave Israel in control of 2 million hostile Gazans.

In any event, the threat posed by Hamas in Gaza is, from Netanyahu’s perspective, secondary to the existential threat posed by Iran. This explains why Netanyahu has been prepared to pay a heavy domestic political price for his continued restraint vis-à-vis Gaza. In hierarchical terms, Netanyahu’s top regional priority is countering Iran’s nuclear program and, secondly, Tehran’s attempts to set up a permanent military presence in Lebanon and Syria—especially along the Golan Heights. By containing the conflict with Hamas through recurring cease-fires, however short-lived they may be, Netanyahu is trying to create the political space he needs to focus attention on the larger strategic priority of confronting Iran.

“Iran is devouring one nation after the other,” Netanyahu recently told the London-based Royal Institute of International Affairs. “It is doing so either by direct conquest or by using proxy. They took over Lebanon, Yemen. . . . They try to do the same thing with Iraq, in Syria. The good news is that the other guys [Sunni-Muslim countries] are getting together with Israel as never before. It is something that I would have never expected in my lifetime,” Netanyahu said.

Netanyahu has kept the upper hand, at least for now. Lieberman’s resignation as defense minister threatened to bring down Netanyahu’s coalition government over Gaza policy. In an impassioned televised address, Netanyahu had rejected calls for early elections.

After an unrelated coalition crisis over a new military conscription bill affecting exemptions from compulsory service for ultra-Orthodox Jewish men, Netanyahu subsequently announced that early elections will be held in April.

by Soeren Kern, a senior fellow at the Gatestone Institute, a non-partisan foreign-policy think tank based in New York City.
EGYPT—The Egyptian government has rejected a proposed bill to remove the religious designation required on ID cards, reflecting the enormity of the discrimination and persecution Christians face in the Muslim-dominated country.

The Egyptian government requires ID cards for almost every aspect of public life, and a Christian designation can cause problems at police stops, checkpoints, hospitals, and workplaces for the approximately 10 percent of the population that is Christian. “Whenever there is a situation that requires showing your ID, . . . you would be categorized right away,” head of policy for the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms Sherif Azer said.

Members of Egypt’s constitutional and legislative committees and the religion affairs committee determined that the proposed bill to end religious designations on ID cards did not meet the requirements for law. Their conclusion provided a smokescreen for the real reasons for the rejection, Azer said.

People arguing against the bill claimed religion doesn’t contradict the values of citizenship, the ID doesn’t prevent anyone from practicing a specific religion, and that chaos would ensue without the religious designation—such as families of Christians and Muslims burying their deceased loves ones in the graveyards of the wrong religion. “They said other silly stuff, . . . [trying to] distract from the main issue. There is no way that families would be confused,” Azer said.

“This proposal comes up frequently, and nothing ever comes of it,” Timothy Kaldas, a fellow at the Tahir Institute for Middle East Policy, said. “In general, reforms surrounding religion in Egypt are pretty hard to pass, and even when they do . . . it is often too little, if any effect,” Kaldas said.

Organizations such as sports clubs and universities in Egypt also often require one’s religion on forms, according to Ishak Ibrahim, a human-rights researcher at the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights. “There is a great need for a commission to stand up against and prevent religious discrimination and help victims of discrimination in all its forms,” Ibrahim said.

Christians in Egypt face greater challenges than the ID card issue. They face discriminatory laws in building and maintaining houses of worship and are often attacked by Muslim persecutors. Lawmakers fail to properly prosecute the attackers, Kaldas said, and instead carry out informal “reconciliation” meetings in which community elders gather to discuss a compromise, usually ending in Christians losing their worship rights. “So it creates this air of impunity around attacking churches,” he said.

Although the Egyptian constitution guarantees freedom of expression and belief, security agents from the Ministry of the Interior routinely harass and arrest converts who are suspected of leaving Islam. During Ramadan in 2016, an esteemed Egyptian Islamic scholar, Ahmed el-Tayyib, said on TV that apostates who leave Islam should be executed.

Recently, Islamic militants in Egypt killed nine Christians who were on their way to a monastery, underlying the lack of protections Christians receive from the government. “It happened exactly the same way the year before, almost at the same place,” Azer said of the attack.

As long as Sharia (Islamic law) is the source of legislation in Egypt, Christians will remain the target of Islamic persecution.

by Morning Star News

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THE HATE THAT WON’T DIE

People talk about tolerance these days. But there’s an evil that should not be tolerated, and it goes back thousands of years.

by Steve Herzig
A friend of mine told me a story recently that I think you’ll appreciate. A few years ago, her daughter Andi attended an event at Disney World that called for audience participation. The emcee picked three women in their 20s to stand up. The first question he asked was where they were from. With great hesitation, they answered, “Israel.”

After the show, Andi waited outside to speak to them and excitedly asked, “Are you really from Israel?”

Hesitantly, they said yes, whereupon Andi burst out, “I love Israel!” The Israelis were shocked. Seldom in their young lives had they encountered people who love the Jewish state. They told Andi they were afraid to say where they were from because “the world hates us.”

Sad to say, they probably are right. Anti-Semitism is widespread. David Bar-Ilan, who died in 2003 after serving as executive director of The Jerusalem Post and then spokesman for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government from 1996 to 1999, once said, “Israel itself has become the world’s Jew.”

According to a 2014 Anti-Defamation League (ADL) survey of more than 53,000 people in 102 countries, anti-Semitism saturates the Middle East. The numbers are staggering: 93 percent of the people in the West Bank and Gaza hate Jews; 92 percent in Iraq; 88 percent in Yemen; 87 percent in Libya; 86 percent in Tunisia; 82 percent in Kuwait; 81 percent in Bahrain; 81 percent in Jordan; and 80 percent in Morocco, despite the fact 70 percent of those surveyed never met a Jewish person.

These statistics explain, in part, why so much violence and hatred are directed toward Israel. Hundreds of Hamas rockets strike the country regularly. Since 2005, Hamas has fired more than 20,000 projectiles into Israel. Suicide bombs, car and bus bombs, incendiary kites, weaponized cars—all these devices and more are used to terrorize the Jewish state. Worse yet, many Muslim countries have institutionalized anti-Semitic propaganda in their education curricula, ensuring new generations of Jew-haters in the future.
OUTSIDE THE UNITED STATES

Anti-Semitism is not a recent phenomenon. As early as the book of Esther, Haman, the anti-Semitic Agagite, manipulated Persian King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) to order the annihilation of world Jewry. Haman, of course, failed to achieve his objective; and Jewish people consequently celebrate the festival of Purim.

In 165 BC, Mattathias Maccabeus and his family saved the Jewish people from both death and forced assimilation by defeating the anti-Semite Antiochus Epiphanes. That victory led to the festival of Hanukkah.

As time passed and the Jewish people were dispersed from their land, they became victims of the Crusades, the Inquisition, pogroms, and the Holocaust. Millions were murdered.

The ADL survey suggests 1.09 billion people in the world are anti-Semitic. Here is a minute sampling of what happened in 2018 alone:

- In March in Paris, an 85-year-old Holocaust survivor was murdered in her apartment because she was Jewish.
- In August, in the Russian village of Lyubavichi, the cradle of the Chabad Hasidic movement, someone scrawled “Jews out of Russia, our land” on the wall of a Jewish center.
- In the same month in Romania, the home of the late Elie Wiesel, an Auschwitz survivor and Nobel laureate, was defaced with anti-Semitic graffiti that read, “in hell with Hitler.”
- In September in Paris, graffiti reading “Jewish scum live here” was sprayed on an apartment building.
- In October in Nice, France, four Jewish boys were beaten because one of them was wearing a Star of David pendant.
- The new bestseller in the Netherlands is Adolf Hitler’s Mein Kampf.

IN THE GOLDENE MEDINA

Sadly, none of this news surprises me. I was born in America because of the anti-Semitic pogroms in Eastern Europe. All four of my grandparents emigrated from Eastern Europe in the early 20th century because they knew the Goldene Medina (Yiddish for “golden land,” referring to America) would give them hope in a country where they did not have to be afraid of being persecuted and killed for being Jewish.

Little did they know the Goldene Medina—the safe haven they enjoyed and that my father, a World War II veteran, fought to defend—would become more and more anti-Semitic in the 21st century. Today Jewish people have good reason to be concerned. The ADL reported a 57 percent increase in anti-Semitic incidents from 2016 to 2017. In 2016, Jewish people were the victims of more than half of all the hate crimes against religious minorities in America. When the figures are tabulated for 2018, the number of incidents will probably be higher. Here are but a few of the things that took place:

- In September, in Marlboro, New Jersey, anti-Semitic graffiti was spray-painted on a tree and roadway stop line around the Jewish center.
- In September, the home of a supporter of Jewish Congress- man Josh Gottheimer (D-NJ) was vandalized with a swastika.
- On two consecutive days in October, separate attacks took place against two Orthodox Jewish men in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, New York. Both men were beaten.
- In Cherry Hill, New Jersey, anti-Semitic flyers containing offensive language and displaying the emblem of the Ku Klux Klan were placed on the lawns of 30 homes.
- In a speech given in October to mark the 23rd anniversary of the Million Man March, Louis Farrakhan, former leader of the Nation of Islam, spoke directly to the Jewish community: “To the members of the Jewish community that don’t like me, thank you very much for putting my name all over the planet because of your fear of what we represent. I can go anywhere in the world and they’ve heard of Farrakhan. Thank you very much.” Farrakhan continued, “I’m not mad at you because you’re so stupid. So when they talk about Farrakhan, call me a hater, you do what they do, call me an anti-Semite. Stop it, I’m anti-Termite.”

THE ONLINE CESSPOOL

The Internet is a cesspool of anti-Semitic activity. A study by the World Jewish Congress (WJC) found that more than 382,000 anti-Semitic comments were posted to social-media platforms in 2016—an average of more than 43.6 posts per hour, or one post every 83 seconds.

The WJC survey also determined that an overwhelming 63 percent of all anti-Semitic content online can be found on Twitter. WJC CEO Robert Singer said, “We knew that anti-Semitism online was on the rise, but the numbers revealed in this report give us concrete data as to how alarming the situation really is.” That alarm sounded loud and clear in October in Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh,
Pennsylvania, when Robert Bowers walked into Tree of Life Synagogue shouting, “All Jews must die!” and murdered 11 Jewish worshipers in what has been called the worst anti-Semitic act in American history.

Ben Shapiro, editor-in-chief of the Daily Wire and an observant Jewish man wrote, “America is the most tolerant and accepting and loving country the Jews have experienced, outside of Israel, in the long span of recorded time. But the curse of anti-Semitism never leaves the Jews.”

Shapiro is right. Anti-Semitism never leaves, but neither does the opportunity to love Jewish people. As Christians, we know they are God’s Chosen People (Dt. 7:6) and the apple of His eye (Zech. 2:8). That is why Andi waited after the Disney show for the three Israeli women. She wanted them to know she loved Israel and that she loved them.

Love for Israel and the Jewish people should characterize all believers in Jesus. It motivated those of you who gave to our Friends of Israel Holocaust Survivors Fund. As a result of your gifts, the Jewish Community Relations Council of Southern New Jersey has $5,000 more to provide emergency medical needs and support for elderly Jewish people who suffered so much in the past.

God says in His Word He loves the Jewish people “with an everlasting love” (Jer. 31:3). They need to know that, and they need to know you love them too.

Steve Herzig
is the director of North American Ministries and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry.
ASSESSING THE RETURN OF HAMAN

BY ELWOOD McQUAID
The more things change, the more they stay the same. And if we don’t believe that axiom, we can look at Persia—now called Iran.

People visiting Israel during the annual Purim celebration in March, when masses of costumed Israelis joyously parade through the streets, might liken the event to America’s raucous observance of Halloween. But the comparison would be grossly inaccurate.

Purim has nothing to do with make-believe goblins or ghoulish apparitions prowling neighborhoods on All Hallows’ Eve. That tradition was bequeathed to the West by the ancient Celts who ignited bonfires and wore outlandish costumes in an attempt to ward off evil spirits at the end of the harvest.

The origin of Purim resides in historical reality, dating back some 2,500 years to the massive, ancient Persian Empire that spanned from India to Ethiopia and into portions of what is now Greece.

The Purim account appears in the biblical book of Esther. Most intriguing about the affair is that the crucial elements in the beautiful true story of the orphan who became queen live on in vivid detail at this moment in history.

The Tale Unfolds
The man on Persia’s throne at the time was Ahasuerus, otherwise identified as Xerxes I or Xerxes the Great, who reigned over 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia (Est 1:1).

Historians have described the king as quick-tempered, beset by excessive indulgences, and inadequate as a military leader. After he expelled Queen Vashti for refusing his command to display herself at an orgy before a gathering of drunken men, he chose Esther from among the land’s virgins and made her his queen: “The king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; so he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Vashti” (2:17).

With the death of both her parents, young Esther had become the ward of her cousin Mordecai, who had stepped in to raise her as his own daughter (v. 7). Mordecai was the great-grandson of a Benjamite Jew named Kish, who had been taken into captivity “with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away” (v. 6).

Mordecai’s strength lay in the fact that, although in exile far from home, he never forgot who he was or disregarded his bond with the Jewish people scattered among the 127 provinces of the sprawling Persian Empire.

Haman entered the scene as the foremost vizier,
the highest official under the king: “King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who were with him” (3:1).

Haman brought with him a deep-seated hatred of the Jewish people that is perhaps explained by his descent from Agag, the king of the Amalekites, who were entrenched enemies of Israel as far back as the days of Moses, Joshua, Saul, and King David. Consequently, Haman’s wrath was not limited to Mordecai alone, who refused to bow before him in the king’s gate. Haman hated all Jews, and his intense feelings prompted him to fashion a decree of genocide that would have destroyed world Jewry because all Jewish people in that day lived within the Persian Empire.

Haman told Ahasuerus, “There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from all other people’s, and they do not keep the king’s laws. Therefore it is not fitting for the king to let them remain. If it pleases the king, let a decree be written that they be destroyed” (vv. 8–9).

FOR SUCH A TIME . . .
The drama that unfolded exhibits all to be desired in courage, unqualified commitment, and the will to survive.

Mordecai’s words to Esther in revealing Haman’s nefarious plot and its potential consequences for their people exemplify both faith in God’s intervention and an understanding of what it means to be the right person in the right place at the right time:

Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king’s palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this? (4:13–14).

Esther knew entering the king’s presence uninvited could yield a fate much worse than Vashti’s. But she decided to go anyway. Her now-immortal conclusion was, “I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!” (v. 16).

THE REST OF THE STORY
Haman’s plea to Ahasuerus to slaughter all of Persia’s Jews had been granted and was sealed in a document that could not be rescinded. As an added incentive, the executioners received permission to steal their victims’ goods: “Letters were sent by couriers into all the king’s provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions” (3:13, emphasis added).

Unfortunately for Haman, when Ahasuerus finally learned he had agreed to annihilate his own queen’s people, he had Haman hung on the gallows the vizier had prepared for Mordecai; and he gave the Jews
permission to defend themselves—that is, to fight for their lives.

The results of the ensuing struggle exposed the extent of the Jew-hatred held by some in the kingdom. No fewer than 75,000 Persians were cut down during the fighting. An interesting aside is that the Jewish people “did not lay a hand on the plunder” (9:10). The fight was not about taking a spoil; it was about the right to live.

HAMAN’S RETURN

After an astonishing 2,500 years of continuous monarchical Persian rule, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini ousted the last of the monarchs, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, in the 1979 Islamic revolution. The country’s seizure by Khomeini and radical Muslim mullahs heralded the symbolic return of Haman, whose rant, “death to the Jews,” would ring out once again.

In fact, Haman could not have stated the case more clearly than the compatriots in Tehran.

Iran’s current supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khameini, has repeatedly declared that Israel must be destroyed. He even took to Twitter to spew his vitriol: “This barbaric, wolflike & infanticidal regime of Israel which spares no crime has no cure but to be annihilated.”

Mohammad Hassan Rahimian, Khamenei’s representative, agrees: “We have manufactured missiles that allow us, when necessary to replace [sic] Israel in its entirety with a big holocaust.”

And while the central focus remains on Israel and its Jewish citizens, the United States and Western nations are not exempt from the radical Islamist quest to conquer and destroy. Even in 2006, Iranian leader Ali Khamenei said on Iranian television,

Today, America poses a threat to peace and security in the world. Therefore, the slogan “Death to America” is no longer used only by our people. Today, you see throughout the world people setting fire to the effigy of the American president and chanting the slogan “Death to America.” This is because of the American regime’s exaggerated demands, its arrogance, its vanity, and its desire to control, and because it is a pawn in the hands of the Zionists.

Iran’s current leaders entertain expansionist dreams far beyond what Xerxes envisioned when he launched military campaigns to conquer Greece and expand his empire. Ayatollah Khamenei has made it clear. In an online article, Eliot Assoudeh, a PhD candidate in political science, summed up the Islamic intent: “The Islamic Revolution in Iran had five goals to achieve, as stated by its current supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khameini: the revolution, formation of the Islamic system, formation of the Islamic state, formation of the Islamic nation and formation of the Islamic civilization.”

When costumed children of the 21st century gather to cheer Queen Esther and jeer Haman in 2019, it’s as much a testimonial to present reality as it was thousands of years ago. And perhaps as today’s Purim is celebrated in an Israel dotted with bomb shelters, we should remember that evil never disappears; it only pauses from time to time.

As it was in ancient Persia, Israelis have the ability to strike back. Those harboring Haman’s passion to destroy the Jewish people may end up making a trip to the gallows themselves.

ENDNOTES

A LOOK AT THE EVIL ONE’S
ATTEMPTS TO SPOIL GOD’S PLAN—
AND WHY HE NEVER WILL

THE OTHER-WORLDLY WAR

by Tom Simcox
Being

A Christian has never been easy. We find ourselves at odds with the world. More often than not, our values, ethics, and morals directly conflict with those held by the majority.

The reality is that genuine believers in Jesus Christ are caught up in a war that is raging all around us. Although this warfare manifests itself in the physical realm, it is best understood as an “other-worldly” conflict—a spiritual war. As the apostle Paul wrote, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12).

No one who has ever walked this planet understoo that battle better than Jesus.

THE CONFLICT BEGINS

After Satan coaxed Adam and Eve to rebel against God, Satan won what we could call the “title deed” to planet Earth. That is why Jesus called Satan “the ruler of this world” (Jn. 12:31) and why the apostle John wrote, “The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 Jn. 5:19). Satan wants to dethrone God and rule the universe. His plan has been simple: (1) prevent Jesus from coming, (2) prevent Jesus from dying on the cross, and (3) prevent Jesus from returning.

After the fall of humanity, God warned Satan He would send a Redeemer who would make things right: “He [the promised One] shall bruise your [Satan’s] head, and you [Satan] shall bruise His [the Redeemer’s] heel” (Gen. 3:15).

This declaration compelled Satan to do everything in his power to prevent the promised Redeemer-Messiah from coming to Earth, and the Evil One’s nefarious attempts to do so run the length and breadth of the Hebrew Scriptures. God’s Chosen People faced relentless, satanic assaults aimed at destroying or corrupting them. These attacks hit full stride after the promised Messiah made His entrance into human history through a Jewish woman in a little town named Bethlehem.

Informed by the magi that the “King of the Jews” (Mt. 2:2) was born, Herod the king determined to kill Him. Jesus’ parents, Mary and Joseph, took the Child and fled to Egypt.

At the outset of Jesus’ ministry, Satan attempted to corrupt Him: “Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil” (4:1). Satan showed Jesus “all the kingdoms of the world and their glory” and told Him, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me” (vv. 8–9). The creature was asking his Creator to worship him. Jesus, of course, refused.

At the core of the conflict is Satan’s insatiable desire to “be like the Most High” (Isa. 14:14). He wanted to be God in the Garden of Eden, and he still wants to be God today.

In an attempt to accomplish this feat while Jesus was on Earth, Satan tempted Jesus in the three greatest areas of human vulnerability: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—the same areas in which we are tempted. Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, thwarted each temptation using God’s Word.

Though Jesus was fully God, He also was fully man; and that was the nature Satan attacked. Yet Jesus remained sinless and pure—“a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:19).

Failing to corrupt the Messiah, Satan then tried other tactics to keep Him from going to the cross and thus completing His mission of redemption, which would spell Satan’s defeat. In one instance, Jesus returned to His hometown synagogue in Nazareth, and people forced Him from the building and led Him “to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff” (Lk. 4:29).

Yet Satan failed to precipitate Jesus’ premature
death, as Jesus passed “through the midst of them” and “went His way” (v. 30).

**TIMING AND INTENSITY**

When that tactic failed, Satan tried to precipitate Jesus’ premature installation as King, outside God’s plan. As Christ continued His ministry throughout the Galilee, He saw “a great multitude coming toward Him” (Jn. 6:5). Andrew, the apostle Peter’s brother, found a young boy who had “five barley loaves and two small fish” (v. 9). Jesus’ miracle of taking such a meager lunch and feeding 5,000 men, plus women and children, got the masses’ attention.

“This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world,” they said (v. 14). “Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed . . . alone” (v. 15). Just as Jesus’ premature death would have ruined God’s plan of redemption, so too would His premature kingship. Bible commentator Edwin Blum explained:

“This marks the highpoint of Jesus’ popularity and a great temptation for Him. Could He have the kingdom without the Cross? No. Jesus’ kingdom would be given to Him by the Father (cf. Ps. 2:7–12; Dan. 7:13–14). It will not come from this world (John 18:36). The path of the Father’s will lies in another direction. Before He can be the reigning Lion of Judah, He must be the Lamb who bears the sin of the world (1:29).”

The closer Jesus came to the cross—to redeeming lost humanity by delivering the death blow to Satan—the more intense became the demonic attacks He was forced to endure.

Shortly before the Roman soldiers arrested Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus had a season of prayer that was anything but sweet: “‘Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me.’ And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Lk. 22:42, 44).

We will never fully grasp the nature or depth of Christ’s spiritual battle. Was Jesus actually sweating blood, or was His agony so intense His perspiration felt like blood? Commentators differ. We may not know the answer, but we do know Jesus was already beginning to suffer for lost souls because an angel was dispatched to strengthen Him physically and spiritually.

Later the wife of Pontius Pilate, the Roman prefect in Jerusalem who ordered Jesus crucified, sent word to her husband, “Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him” (Mt. 27:19). Who or what was behind her dream? Her torment probably did not come from God because Christ came to Earth to die as humanity’s final sacrifice for sin. This seems like yet another satanic ploy to derail God’s plan.

**VICTORY IN JESUS**

As Jesus hung on the cross, His assailants taunted Him: “If He is the King of Israel let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him” (v. 42).

If Jesus had abandoned the cross even for a second, Satan would have been the victor. Today we would be without hope, dead in our trespasses and sin, with no one who could rescue us from the awful and permanent consequences of God’s righteous judgment.

But Jesus endured the shame of the cross. He submitted to the plan established before the foundation of the world and gave up His spirit: “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit” (Lk. 23:46). He allowed Himself to be crucified because of His great love for us.

Satan made one last attempt to defeat Jesus. The chief priests and Pharisees told Pilate that Jesus had promised, “After three days I will rise” (Mt. 27:63). They received a detail of soldiers to guard the tomb, which was blocked by an enormously heavy stone and certified with the legal, official seal of the Roman Empire—all to no avail.
Satan’s attempt to thwart the resurrection failed miserably. Today he is trying to keep Jesus from returning, so he is working tirelessly to destroy the Jewish people because without them there can be no Davidic Kingdom for Jesus to rule.

But God will not be thwarted. He says in Isaiah, “I work, and who will reverse it?” (43:13). Satan could not reverse God’s plan of redemption in those days, and he cannot reverse it now. Because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, people everywhere may receive forgiveness of sin and everlasting life by placing their faith in the One who took their punishment on the cross. Christ, indeed, arose; and though this world lies under the sway of the Evil One, faith in Jesus—and in Jesus alone—gives us the victory “that has overcome the world” (1 Jn. 5:4).

ENDNOTE


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DID JESUS REALLY RISE FROM THE DEAD? 
EXAMINING THE EVIDENCE LEADS TO ONLY ONE CONCLUSION.
INCONTESTABLE

BY CHRIS KATULKA
Though most denominations have theological differences, one core truth binds the whole lot together: the belief in the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Without the resurrection, Christ never would have been proven to be the Messiah of Israel. Without the resurrection, Christ's teaching and eternal sacrifice, made to atone for our sins, never would have been verified. Without the resurrection, Christ's exaltation and ascension to the right hand of the Father never would have been realized. The resurrection is the fulcrum upon which all of Christianity hinges.

The apostle Paul, who experienced Jesus only after Christ's resurrection, knew full well our faith rises and falls on that important event: “And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty” (1 Cor. 15:14). If Christ were not raised, the church would be meaningless; and we would still be dead in our trespasses and sins.

However, Jesus’ resurrection was real; and though we weren’t there to examine the empty tomb ourselves, God graciously left us ample evidence of the resurrection to corroborate our faith: the New Testament. His Word contains the accounts of the eyewitnesses who encountered the risen Christ. So how reliable is the New Testament?

A TRUSTWORTHY SOURCE

Historians rely on ancient texts to gather knowledge of past civilizations. Dr. Daniel Wallace, senior research professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, believes that, when it comes to the New Testament, scholars have an “embarrassment of riches.” Even the classical Greek and Latin writings we rely on to understand the historical movements of world history are not as verifiable as the New Testament.

For example, today we have a mere 27 copies of Livy’s History of Rome, and the earliest of the copies date to the 4th century AD, 300 years after Livy wrote his original. Yet historians admit that without Livy, the struggles of the Roman people and the creation of the empire would have long been forgotten. Livy is a reliable resource for historical events.

Compared to the extant number of copies of the New Testament, however, Livy’s History of Rome is paltry. We have more than 5,600 copies of the Greek New Testament and another 19,000 copies in the Syriac, Latin, Coptic, and Aramaic languages. In all, we have more than 24,000 New Testament manuscripts.

In addition, the earliest manuscript in existence today dates back to AD 125, mere decades after the New Testament authors penned their Gospels and Epistles. Christian apologist Gary Habermas, an authority on the resurrection of Christ, said in his book The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus, “The closer the time between the event and testimony about it, the more reliable the witness, since there is less time for exaggeration, and even legend, to creep into the account.”

In short, the New Testament remains a reliable source for communicating historical truth about Jesus’ resurrection.

WITNESS ACCOUNTS

Early on the day Jesus arose, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and other women went to the tomb to complete Jesus’ burial process (Lk. 24:1–10). According to their testimony, when they arrived at the tomb they found the stone rolled away. Out of curiosity, they entered the tomb and found Jesus’ body missing. The women claimed two men stood beside the tomb saying, “He is not here, but is risen!” (v. 6).

Interestingly, the Gospel writers consistently and purposefully placed Mary Magdalene as the first eyewitness of Jesus’ empty tomb. Yet a woman’s testimony in the culture of that day was never well received and often was intentionally overlooked. Even in the Gospel of Luke, when the women rushed to share the news of the empty tomb with the apostles, the men considered their story “like idle tales, and they did not believe them” (v. 11). Peter was the only apostle of the 11 who ran to the tomb to see for himself.

If Jesus’ resurrection had been fabricated, the
Gospel writers would never have placed Mary Magdalene in the front row of the most significant event of human history. Instead, they would have concocted a story that would have generated more credibility.

What the women saw was only the beginning of what would become a series of Christ’s postresurrection appearances to the apostles and His followers. The apostle Paul began 1 Corinthians 15 by citing the people to whom Christ appeared. He even told the Corinthians some of the 500 who saw Jesus were still alive, hinting that the resurrection appearances could still be validated by eyewitnesses:

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some
have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time (vv. 3–8).

If the resurrection had been fabricated, Paul was opening himself to serious ridicule. Bible commentator Craig Keener wrote, “Paul’s purpose in appealing to witnesses still alive is to invite his readers to check his facts if they doubt his words.”

Scholars also believe Paul’s opening statement in verses 3–8 should be understood as an ancient creed given to him by Peter and James a mere three to eight years after Jesus’ resurrection. In the Jewish tradition, a rabbi passed down to his students what he learned from his rabbi. Jewish scholar Pinchas Lapide said this creed follows the Jewish tradition and “may be considered as a statement of eyewitnesses.”

But it’s what these eyewitnesses were willing to risk that becomes the greatest proof for the resurrection.

**WORTH DYING FOR**

When Jesus appeared to the disciples after He rose from the dead, He pulled Peter aside and told him he, too, would suffer a gruesome death because of his love for Jesus and His followers (Jn. 21:18–19). If Jesus had never arisen, the disciples eventually would have disbanded and returned to their original professions.

However, they did not. The resurrection changed the course of their lives; they became evangelists of the risen Savior. As evangelists, they risked everything, even their lives, to defend their testimonies that they witnessed Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection.

Historian Michael Licona explained that, after the resurrection, the disciples positioned themselves in a way that serves as a historical marker, indicating that what they were willing to die for, they truly believed in:
After Jesus’ death, the disciples endured persecution, and a number of them experienced martyrdom. The strength of their conviction indicates that they were not just claiming Jesus had appeared to them after rising from the dead. They really believed it. They willingly endangered themselves by publicly proclaiming the risen Christ.\(^3\)

Habermas, who has spent his career researching the resurrection, called the evidence supporting it “incontestable.” “What’s at stake here,” he said, “is the truth of the Kingdom of God and eternal life, to which Jesus taught that He was the only path.”\(^4\)

Two thousand years after the resurrection, we carry that eyewitness testimony of Jesus’ resurrection in our hearts. The same resurrection that forever changed the lives of Mary Magdalene, Joanna, the apostles, Stephen, James, Paul, more than 500 witnesses, and untold millions around the world for centuries is at work changing our lives today.

ENDNOTES


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THE BERLEAN BOX

WHY WILL PEOPLE OFFER ANIMAL SACRIFICES IN THE MILLENNIAL TEMPLE?

People often ask, “If Jesus’ sacrifice was the only efficacious, once-for-all sacrifice to expiate sin (Heb. 9:12), why should animal sacrifices, which could never take away sin (10:4), be offered in the Millennial Temple during the Millennium?”

It is true the sacrifices in the Millennial Temple will not expiate sin, just as the Mosaic offerings could not take away sin (v. 4). Many conservative commentators believe these offerings will be memorials, similar to communion that Christians take in remembrance of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. They believe the offerings will serve as visible reminders of Christ’s efficacious work.

Although true, it seems these sacrifices also will have an additional function. Scripture says they will be offered “to make atonement for the house of Israel” (Ezek. 45:17; cf. vv. 15, 20). This sacrificial system will not constitute a return to the Old Testament Mosaic Covenant or Law but will be a new system set up by the Lord with a dispensational distinctive applicable to the Millennial Kingdom.

The Hebrew word for atonement means “covering.” The blood sacrifices that made atonement never removed sin; they simply covered it, staving off God’s divine anger and punishment by providing a ransom. Christ’s death on the cross—not the Levitical sacrificial system—made it possible for people’s sins to be taken away.

The animal sacrifices during the Millennium will primarily remove ceremonial uncleanness and prevent human defilement of the Millennial Temple. This system will be needed because God’s glorious presence will again dwell on Earth in the midst of sinners. This purging act propitiates God, enabling Him to dwell among His people.

The atonement-cleansing was necessary in Leviticus because the Shekinah Glory dwelt in the Tabernacle (Ex. 40:34). God resided in the midst of sinful, unclean people. Similarly, Ezekiel predicted the return of God’s glory to the Millennial Temple. Thus people worshiping at the Temple will need to atone for their uncleanness, so it won’t cause defilement.

The future animal sacrifices will not deal with eternal salvation but, rather, with finite cleansing of impurities from everyone who survived the Great Tribulation (they will have mortal bodies) and the children born to them during Christ’s thousand-year reign. Those born will still have to trust Christ by faith to become saved.


BY DAVID M. LEVY
Without the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, believers have not been forgiven, believing loved ones who died are lost forever, and Christians live miserable lives.

In fact, Christians live a lie if Jesus is not bodily alive at this very moment: “And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most pitiable” (1 Cor. 15:17–19).

We would have to think that God lied to us and that nothing in life really matters. As Bible scholar Charles Swindoll wrote, “If Jesus didn’t come back, alive, from the dead or if His resurrection was a hoax, then nothing—absolutely nothing—has any meaning at all.”

But the resurrection is not a hoax. It is truth. In space and time during the first century, God sent Jesus to die on a cross and be raised from the dead in the same body in which He died. The entire Christian faith depends on this historical truth even though many Christians “often pay less attention to the resurrection than to the death of Christ.” The resurrection serves as the
source for both future and present blessings from God, and the importance of this truth must never be understated.

HOW THE RESURRECTION AFFECTS OUR FUTURE

The resurrection actually forces us to look to the future. One day, believers in Christ who have died will rise from the grave just as Jesus did almost 2,000 years ago. He taught us, “Because I live, you will live also” (Jn. 14:19).

On that great day, every believer will receive a transformed (glorified) body fashioned like Christ's resurrection body, one that cannot sin or die (Phil. 3:20–21). Among the grandest words in the whole Bible are Jesus' words about Himself (and our future) as He prepared to raise His friend Lazarus from the tomb: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live" (Jn. 11:25). Jesus' resurrection points powerfully to the future resurrection of all those who know Him. God has made a promise He will not break. God does not break His promises.

Because of the future hope we have in our own resurrection, we can have strong assurance that we will go to be with the Father in heaven when we die: “We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8).

Believers who are alive when Jesus comes to rapture the church will not experience death (1 Cor. 15:51–52; 1 Th. 4:13–18). They will be glorified and ascend to the Father's house with everyone who died in Christ and is raised from the dead. At Christ's Second Coming to Earth, all believers will claim their inheritance in the earthly Kingdom of God (Rev. 19—20).

Another future benefit of the resurrection involves our believing loved ones who have gone to heaven before us. It is quite natural for us to wonder about them as we suffer the pain of separation. But remembering that Jesus is alive and has promised that we also shall live reminds us we will hug their necks again. We will enjoy their presence forever.

The overwhelming presence of the risen Christ among us will make such everlasting joy and fellowship possible. In my younger days, I found such descriptions boring. I thought, What will I do in eternity? Just hold hands and sing songs? Now that I know the Bible better, I know God will assign us remarkable projects based on the extremely personal relationships He has with us individually and the rewards He gives us. Jesus described these duties in wonderful, administrative terms: “You . . . have authority over ten cities” (Lk. 19:17). There is so much to look forward to because Jesus is alive.

HOW THE RESURRECTION AFFECTS US TODAY

Belief in Christ's resurrection is not merely pie-in-the-sky hope for tomorrow. Benefits in the here and now abound because Jesus was raised from the dead.

We have the biblical doctrine of justification, which refers to the declaration that believers are innocent of their sins. God declares a lost sinner “not guilty” when he or she places complete faith in Christ.

Justification is not a future hope; it is a past transaction with God that has a present ramification in this life. We stand righteous before God today and for all time. According to Romans 4:25, our justification stems from Christ's resurrection from the dead. Thus, because Christ is alive, we can live in the assurance that God does not hold our sins against us. We can live forgiven lives.

The apostle Paul, however, went further; he longed to grow in his knowledge and experience of Christ until the time of his own resurrection: “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection” (Phil. 3:10). He knew Jesus' resurrection provides a power source for everyday Christian living. We, too, should crave “resurrection power” to live for the Lord today.3

Another glorious benefit is the courage Christ's resurrection brings to the Christian life. Such bravery shone in the early church as the resurrection "empowered the early Christian community with incredible courage in the face of seemingly impossible obstacles and terrifying threats. Why? Because their trust was not in this broken world but in the risen Christ present with them as they sat together 'at the Lord’s Table' or faced the wild animals of the Roman Colosseum.”4

Such courage is available to believers everywhere as we follow Him earnestly. As a result, we can face the world with hope even in the midst of the deepest sorrow (1 Th. 4:13–18).

In the cursed world we live in, we face the obscene specter of death every day. Death is a great enemy. But Christ has defeated this horrible foe. He has removed its stinger. As a result, Christians can live today unafraid of death: "O Death, where is your sting?” (1 Cor. 15:55).

The raising of Jesus the Messiah from the dead has given those of us who trust in Him hope for tomorrow and peace for today. And nothing on this Earth could be better than that.

ENDNOTES


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THE TRUTH ABOUT WHO KILLED CHRIST

BY TY PERRY

ARTICLE PHOTOS: LIGHTSTOCK
Jewish people have been murdered, vilified, and hated for centuries as “Christ-killers.” Did they kill Christ? Here is what the Bible teaches.
A few months ago, I met with a high-profile Jewish leader who was giving a talk about his journey from poverty to entrepreneurial success. As a boy growing up in the slums of Boston, he said he was often chased down and beaten up by Gentile kids in his multi-ethnic neighborhood.

One day, after receiving another routine pummelling, he turned to his assailants and pleaded, “Why do you hate me? What have I done to you?” The boys replied with a sneer, as if the answer were obvious: “Because you killed Christ!”

Sadly, this man’s experience is far from unique. For Jewish people, this sort of treatment—and much worse—has been the norm for centuries. Unfortunately, it is rooted in theological ignorance and an all-too-willing disposition to hate.

In the 800s, for example, French Christians began a custom of harassing Jewish people on Easter. In one city, they threw stones at their Jewish neighbors each Palm Sunday. In another, religious leaders would force a Jewish man to stand in the town square and be slapped in the face during the Easter holiday. A historian recorded that one man “was struck so hard that he died of a fractured skull.”

Perhaps the most notable anti-Semites were the Crusaders, whose aim was to liberate Jerusalem from the “infidel” Muslims and Jews. Prior to leaving France for the Holy Land, Duke Godfrey of Bouillon declared he would “avenge the blood of Jesus by leaving ‘no member of the Jewish race alive.’”

On July 8, 1099, Godfrey and his men arrived in the Holy City. When the Muslim governor refused to surrender unconditionally, Godfrey besieged the city. At the end of a weeklong standoff, he and his men broke through Jerusalem’s walls and killed as many people as they could.

A historian recorded the Crusaders “herded 6,000 Jews into a huge synagogue and then set fire to the building.” While burning the Jews alive, some Crusaders reportedly sang the hymn “Christ, We Adore Thee.”

These are merely a few examples of the horrendous damage done by the theological lie that the Jewish people killed Christ. Who did kill Jesus? The answer is multifaceted. On the one hand, a segment of Jerusalem’s Jewish population was complicit in Jesus’ death. But so were the Gentiles, so were you, and so was I. And in yet another sense, nobody killed Jesus.

THE JEWISH PEOPLE
Many who blame the Jewish people for Christ’s death often point to Matthew 27:25 as evidence: After Pontius Pilate washed his hands and declared his innocence “of the blood of this just Person [Jesus]” (v. 24), Scripture says “all the people answered and said, ‘His blood be on us and on our children’” (v. 25).

However, people who use these verses fail to consider the context. Did the entire nation of Israel call for Jesus’ death? Of course not.

First, not all the Jewish people alive at the time lived in Jerusalem, and it was only people in Jerusalem who called for Jesus’ death.

Second, it was the Jewish leaders who orchestrated the crucifixion, not the general public. As Jewry’s spiritual and political representatives, they knew the prophecies of the coming Messiah better than anyone. They should have led the nation in repentance and acceptance of its promised King. Instead, they led a revolt against Him.

Reading Matthew 27 in context reveals that, when Pilate offered the crowd the option of releasing from prison either Jesus or Barabbas, it was “the chief priests and elders” who “persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy
Jesus” (v. 20).

In fact, throughout Jesus’ ministry, the vast majority of people who accepted His message were Jewish. Some Gentiles became believers; but Jesus focused primarily on taking His message to His own people, Israel; and thousands of them believed in Him.

Theologically and historically, it is highly inaccurate to say the Jewish people as a whole killed Jesus.

THE GENTILES

Then we come to the rest of the human population: the Gentiles. How quick many are to blame the Jews for Christ’s death without leveling any charges against the Gentiles.

I have been to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem—the supposed site of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection. Whenever I’m there, I stop to look at the church wall that displays an ancient mural depicting Jesus being nailed to the cross. He is lying on the ground. A woman, presumably Mary, is weeping at His feet. Standing piously by the Lord’s side is a dark-garbed Roman saint, mourning the crucifixion taking place; and near Jesus’ head, hammer and spike in hand, is a Jewish man who has evidently just nailed Jesus to the cross.

Though the use of murals in churches today is rare, at least among evangelicals, these paintings were once the primary means of teaching the Bible to a generally illiterate public. For those who “read” this mural, the message was clear: The Jews killed Jesus. The Romans are innocent. The New Testament, however, tells a different story.

Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, ordered Jesus scourged and then crucified, despite finding Him innocent of all wrongdoing. It was this Gentile governor who sentenced Jesus to death. It was the Gentile Roman soldiers who stripped Jesus of His clothes and mocked Him. Gentle soldiers spat on Him, struck Him on the head, nailed Him to the cross, and speared His side to ensure He was dead.

By no means are Gentiles innocent of Jesus’ murder. If we are going to blame someone, we must also blame the Gentiles.

YOU AND ME

It is tempting for us in the 21st century to engage in what C. S. Lewis called “chronological snobbery.” We think people in Jesus’ day were backward and uncivilized and that we would never kill the Lord today. The problem is, we have already killed Him.

The Jewish Scriptures prophesied the Messiah would die for the sins of others (Is. 53:4–6; Dan. 9:26). The apostle Paul confirmed the Scripture when he wrote, “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21), a message echoed by the apostle John: “He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world” (1 Jn. 2:2).

Our sin today necessitated Jesus’ death on the cross. He had no sin of His own (Heb. 4:15). He was the perfect, sinless “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn. 1:29). Our sin and that of all humanity throughout the ages necessitated the atoning sacrifice of Israel’s Messiah—mankind’s Savior—the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8). His death and resurrection were part of God’s plan of redemption before the world began.

NO ONE

Consequently, it is theologically accurate to say no one killed Jesus.

Jesus Himself said, “No one takes [My life] from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father” (Jn. 10:18).

When Pilate declared, “I have power to crucify You, and power to release You” (19:10), Jesus replied, “You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above” (v. 11). As Scripture tells us, “being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8); and He did it for us.

Jesus gave His life freely so we may receive forgiveness of sin and “dwell in the house of the LORD forever,” as King David said (Ps. 23:6). That fact ought to cause us to cease blaming others for Jesus’ death and bow our heads in grateful humility that we have a Savior who loves us.

ENDNOTES

2 Ibid., 70.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.

Ty Perry is a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry in Nevada.
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CASTING DOWN SERPENTS

Exodus 7:8–12 records the account of Moses’ and Aaron’s first miracle before Pharaoh: turning Aaron’s staff (a symbol of authority) into a serpent that swallowed those produced by Pharaoh’s magicians. This miracle demonstrated the God of Israel’s superiority over Pharaoh and Egypt.

Archaeological discoveries have provided the cultural background of this strange biblical scene, helping us to understand important points by revealing the meaning of obscure terms and ancient Egyptian practices.

Scripture calls the Egyptian magicians hrttmn, the Hebrew word for the Egyptian title hry-hb (lector priest). This elite group of priests performed rituals that evoked the Egyptian deity Heka, who they believed manipulated reality in this world and the next.¹

These priests were not charlatans who, by sleight of hand, revived paralyzed snakes by pinching a nerve behind their heads, as some commentators seeking a natural solution have suggested. Rather, they were occult masters who called on demonic powers to heal, produce rain, and enliven the dead in the afterlife.

The Egyptian Tale of Pharaoh Cheops’ Court (ca. 1600 BC) records some of these priests’ feats, including parting waters, reattaching a severed head, and changing a wax crocodile into a real one and then back to wax again. The ancient Egyptian Book of the Heavenly Cow states, “Moreover, guard against those handlers of heka who know their spells, since the god Heka is in them himself.” Some Egyptian tombs depict priestly processions of Heka carrying a serpent staff in each hand, revealing that rods and serpents were intimately connected in priestly rituals of power.²

These details show that the 10 plagues God brought against Pharaoh and Egypt were directed against specific Egyptian deities and reflect the fact that Moses, the God-inspired author of Exodus, was an insider who had access to the royal court and would have known of these ritual texts and practices. The devouring of the lector priests’ staffs (serpents) symbolized the destruction of their authority and absorption of their power. Since the priests believed they maintained the cosmic order and assisted the sun god on his journey through the underworld, the plagues signaled the Egyptian cosmic order was threatened.

Our English translations say the staffs turned into “snakes” or “serpents.” Ancient pagans often used serpents as motifs in worship, and archaeologists have found models of bronze serpents at ancient Philistine sites (Tel Gezer and Tel Ekron) and Egyptian sites (Timna Valley Temple of Hathor).

In Exodus 4:3, 30, God first demonstrated His power to Moses and later to Israel through Aaron by turning his staff into a snake (Hebrew, nhâhâh). But Exodus chapter 7 uses the Hebrew word tnn when referring to the snake Aaron’s rod became before Pharaoh. The Old Testament uses the word tnn a dozen times to signify a terrifying reptile or—depending on the context—a crocodile, sea monster, or dragon. The Septuagint uses the Greek word drakon.³

Some commentators have suggested tnn refers to a crocodile that supposedly devoured magical spells in the ancient Egyptian religion.⁴ Others believe the word refers to the Uraeus serpent, a cobra symbol that appeared on Pharaoh’s crown.⁵ Tnn could also depict the Egyptian pagan concept of a primordial monster of chaos called Apep. Lector priests ritually cast down wax figurines of Apep to maintain order in the cosmos.

The Hebrew prophets also used tnn metaphorically to describe the leaders of nations that oppressed Israel, including Pharaoh, whom they considered an embodiment of the forces of chaos (Ezek. 29:3; 32:2).

Whatever creature tnn refers to, we know it was created by God (Gen. 1:21) and that He alone controls it (Job 7:12). Therefore, the act of Aaron’s staff devouring the lector priests’ staffs showed that the sovereign God of Israel would devour the false gods and priests of Egypt. This sign was fulfilled when the Lord “swallowed” Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea (Ex. 15:12).

ENDNOTES

1 Geraldine Pinch, Magic in Ancient Egypt (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1995).
5 Eugene Carpenter, Exodus 1–18 in Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 363.

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COMFORTING THE PERSECUTED

2 Thessalonians 1:3–12

The apostle Paul made a practice of visiting churches he had planted and providing pastoral care and counsel. But sometimes opposition to him and his ministry made the task impossible, as it did with the Thessalonian church.

So Paul penned a letter to the Thessalonians and gave it to Timothy to deliver to provide pastoral care. Paul reminded the church that God the Father’s sanctifying grace brought them to salvation through Jesus Christ, resulting in their personal peace, and that God’s peace through Christ would keep and sustain them in the violent persecution they faced.

In 2 Thessalonians 1:3–12, Paul counseled and encouraged these believers in three areas: He praised their faith under persecution (vv. 3–5), described the punishment their persecutors eventually would face (vv. 6–10), and promised ongoing prayer on their behalf (vv. 11–12).

PRAISING THE PERSECUTED

Paul praised the Thessalonians for their commitment to Christ and each other: “We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other” (v. 3).

The apostle and his team felt it imperative to thank God continually for the Thessalonians because they were brothers and sisters in the faith, having received the Lord through Paul’s preaching. Therefore, Paul and Timothy felt privileged to give thanks for their exemplary commitment.

Second, they gave thanks because the Thessalonians’ faith had grown “exceedingly,” or beyond anything the missionary team had expected. The phrase your faith speaks of the Thessalonians’ trust in Christ after they heard the gospel.

Third, they gave thanks for the agape, or self-sacrificing, love these new believers showed to one another. Paul was so impressed by their commitment to the Lord and each other that he said, “We ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure” (v. 4). They joyfully told other churches about the Thessalonians’ faith, patience, and endurance under fierce suffering for Christ—an endurance that could come only from their unwavering trust in the Savior. Notice, they exhibited patience and faith not merely in some trials, but in all of the trials they faced.

Paul assured the Thessalonians their suffering mattered and that their faith and patience provided “evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer” (v. 5).

Their endurance in affliction revealed they were indeed born again, that God’s presence was sustaining them, and that God would judge their persecutors and reward the Thessalonians’ unjust suffering for the gospel. Paul said they suffered so they “may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God” (v. 5). This verse looks toward judgment day, when God will consider them deserving to enter the Kingdom. Their worthiness will come from the fact they put their faith in Christ alone for salvation, not because their suffering was somehow meritorious.

Paul encouraged the Thessalonians not to think about their painful present but, rather, to focus on the glorious Kingdom awaiting them. This future hope comforted and strengthened the believers, reminding them Paul and his missionary team faced the same suffering for the coming Kingdom.

PUNISHING THE PERSECUTORS

Paul abruptly shifted gears and explained God’s future judgment on their ungodly persecutors. He mentioned the “righteous judgment of God” (v. 5) and then described it: “It is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels” (vv. 6–7).

God’s judgment is not arbitrary or capricious; it is righteous because God is a righteous Judge. He is true and just and cannot lie. Since His character is righteous, His judgment is, as well.

God will “repay with tribulation those [the unsaved persecutors] who trouble you” (v. 6). He will compensate in full both the good and evil actions people do to one another. In this case, Paul said God will judge the Thessalonians’ persecutors for their evil deeds.

He assured them those believers who have been “troubled” will receive “rest” when “the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven” (v. 7). The word revealed means “unveiled.” Jesus’ glory was veiled by flesh during His earthly ministry; but at His Second Coming, the veil will be lifted, and everyone will see Christ in His unsurpassed glory. This verse looks to when all believers will experience final relief and rest from the persecution, affliction, and trouble they suffered for their peace, and that God’s peace through Christ would keep and sustain them in the violent persecution they faced.

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faith. They will enter the glories of God’s Kingdom and never suffer again.

When Christ returns, “every eye will see Him” (Rev. 1:7). He will come “in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Th. 1:8). Christ’s return will terrify His enemies as they watch Him coming “in flaming fire,” or encircled with leaping flames.

He will be “taking vengeance” on (punishing) two groups of people. The first will be “those who do not know God,” meaning the heathen Gentiles who rejected the light given to them through natural revelation (Rom. 1:18–23).

The second group will be “those who do not obey the gospel” (2 Th. 1:8). They listened to the gospel and understood the Lord’s death and resurrection but willfully refused to receive Jesus and obey the gospel’s demands. Paul said these people will be “punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (v. 9).

This punishment is not arbitrary. It is a just penalty meted out by a just and righteous God according to His unchanging law. He will repay unbelievers for their character and deeds based on their rejection of what they knew God required of them to be saved.

Their punishment will be “everlasting destruction” (v. 9). Its duration will be eternal and immeasurable. We should not interpret this destruction as annihilation or extinction, because Scripture says unbelievers will live eternally in a state of separation from God and suffer in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10, 14–15).

Paul used two phrases to describe the condition of these unbelievers:

1. They will be away from the presence [face] of the Lord (2 Th. 1:9). God will banish them into outer darkness (Mt. 7:23; 8:12). The unbearable sting is that they will be separated from Him forever and will be tormented day and night for eternity (Rev. 14:11; 20:11–15).

2. They will be away from the glory of His power (2 Th. 1:9). They will be consigned to an eternity devoid of help from God’s power.

In contrast, all who receive Christ as Savior will have a glorious future: “When He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed” (v. 10). This verse centers not on the saved at Christ’s coming but, rather, on the glorious Lord. Perfected believers will have their glorified bodies. Christ not only will be glorified among the believers, but His glory will be manifested in them, as in mirrors.

Paul said the reason for their experience in the Lord was “because our [Paul and his ministry team’s] testimony among you was believed” (v. 10). Paul and his team not only preached the truth of Christ and the gospel among the Thessalonians, but they also personally manifested the reality of Christ’s power and salvation in their lives.

**PRAYER FOR THE PERSECUTED**

As he often did, Paul closed his teaching with a prayer of encouragement: “Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power” (v. 11).

The prayer’s content was twofold: First, it asked God to “count [them] worthy of this calling.” Paul repeated what he stated in verse 5. God would count them worthy based on their salvation through faith in Christ and their devotion to Him.

Second, the prayer asked God to “fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness” in them (v. 11). Paul wanted God to complete the purposes for which He had called them and prayed the Thessalonians would live out their faith through the Holy Spirit’s power.

Paul closed by stating the primary purpose of His team’s prayer: “that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified . . . according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 12).

Therefore, at Christ’s Second Coming, every believer will share in celebration, honor, and glorification—all made possible through God’s grace and the Lord Jesus Christ’s provision of salvation. The Thessalonian church set the example for all believers regarding patience, faithfulness, love of the brethren, service, and love for Christ. Let us carry on the same witness until Christ returns.

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**by David M. Levy,**

director of Education and Ministry Relations

and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry
THE GODLY MAILMAN

It was time—time for the runaway slave to return home to face whatever consequences awaited him. He had been away long enough.

Onesimus was a fugitive. He had fled to Rome where he had placed his faith in Christ through the ministry of the apostle Paul, who was under house arrest at the time. The apostle watched as the Lord dramatically changed the once-useless slave into a servant of great worth, both to the gospel ministry and to him personally. Paul discipled Onesimus, and now it was time for the wayward servant to go home if his journey toward Christlikeness was to continue.

Details of Onesimus’ return are not documented. However, complementary biblical texts shed some light on it. Onesimus was not left to travel and face the consequences alone. According to Paul’s letter to the Colossian church, Tychicus became his traveling companion (Col. 4:7–9)—and therein lies the story behind the story.

THE JOURNEY
The trip would have been lengthy and tedious. Traveling throughout the ancient Roman Empire was treacherous and not to be undertaken alone. After leaving the magnificent city of Rome behind, Onesimus and Tychicus faced a formidable journey that included trekking across the Roman and Greek peninsulas, boarding multiple vessels to cross the Adriatic and Aegean Seas, and trudging inland to Colossae once they arrived on the coast of Asia Minor. They covered hundreds upon hundreds of miles—many of them probably on foot.

The major cities overflowed with every form of debauchery and temptation. Thieves and charlatans prowled the roads and trails. Magnificent stadiums, theaters, and temples dedicated to emperors and false gods were everywhere. The false worship and demonically inspired rituals practiced behind the gleaming marble walls and statues silently proclaimed Christians were not welcome in that culture.

Perhaps the men found a Christian brother or sister who provided hospitality and fellowship, giving them a respite from the danger all around them. Onesimus’ willingness to embark on such a daunting journey was a testimony to Christ’s redemptive work in his life and the sincerity of his repentance. Every day he traveled and every step he walked moved him closer to the end of the journey and his unknown fate, which seemed to lie in the hands of the master whom he had wronged.

Paul knew Philemon, Onesimus’ master, well; and his confidence in the noble Christian character of his longtime friend stirred Paul to write an inspired letter seeking grace on behalf of the returning, guilty servant. Passionately vouching for the vibrant transformation in Onesimus’ life, Paul nevertheless recognized that Onesimus had done wrong and offered to take personal responsibility for any financial loss the servant had inflicted on his master.

AN EXTRAORDINARY LIFE
Although the book of Philemon focuses on Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus, a more in-depth study of the account unveils a story behind the story and the extraordinary life of an ordinary man named Tychicus, the godly mailman.

Paul called Tychicus a “beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord” (Col. 4:7). Writing to the Colossians, his words abounded with warmth and camaraderie for his treasured teammate. Tychicus was a man worthy of trust who discharged his duties faithfully. As a fellow servant, he was wholeheartedly committed to serving the Lord.

The Gentile churches in Asia had chosen Tychicus to join Paul in collecting and delivering an offering for the suffering Jewish believers in Jerusalem (Acts 20:4). Renowned biblicist J. B. Lightfoot said he believes it was Tychicus to whom Paul referred in 2 Corinthians 8:18–19 when he mentioned “the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches . . . who was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with this gift.” (See verses 16–24.) From that time forward, Tychicus
continued ministering with and to the apostle.

Tychicus’s heart for ministry encouraged and blessed many. He was the faithful messenger sent to the churches at Colossae and Ephesus with the express purpose of coming alongside believers there to strengthen and encourage their hearts in Christ. Life was difficult. Disappointments and hard times abounded. Doctrinal confusion proliferated, persecution was commonplace, people couldn’t be trusted, and Christians were apprehensive about Paul’s imprisonment.

Tychicus’s firsthand reports on the beloved apostle’s well-being and the ever-expanding impact of the gospel bolstered and energized believers across Asia Minor. God was at work despite the hardships. (See Ephesians 6:21–22 and Colossians 4:8.)

At one point in his ministry, Tychicus was considered as a possible interim pastor to step in for Titus. Instead, he was selected to accompany Onesimus back to Colossae. That trip also was to include a strategic stop in Ephesus.

Toward the end of Paul’s second and final imprisonment in Rome, some of his companions forsook him or moved to other areas of ministry. Paul yearned to have his son in the faith, Timothy, visit him. So that Timothy could be away from both his pastorate in Ephesus and his leadership role over the churches in Asia Minor, Paul sent Tychicus ahead of time to fill in for him (2 Tim. 4:9–12; Ti. 3:12).

Imagine Philemon’s and the Colossian church’s disbelief and amazement when Tychicus and Onesimus arrived in town. Paul had called Onesimus “one of you” (Col. 4:9) when he wrote to the church that met in Philemon’s home. The believers in Colossae knew Onesimus and probably the circumstances surrounding him. When Paul's letter was read openly, the stunned assembly may have gasped. The presence of a highly regarded eyewitness, such as Tychicus, would have convinced the church that Onesimus' conversion to Christ was genuine.

**DELIVERING THE MAIL**

Tychicus fulfilled his role from behind the scenes. By all accounts, he never wrote a book, started a church, or founded a great ministry. As a “faithful minister,” he carried out the commands of another (v. 7). As a “fellow servant,” he served alongside others (v. 7). He was willing to step forward to meet whatever need he could for the cause of Christ.

Throughout his life, the most impressive task he undertook was probably the most overlooked. During the daunting journey from Rome to Colossae, Tychicus carried three letters of enormous importance. He was the godly mailman entrusted to deliver Paul’s original epistles to the Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon.

Those God-breathed manuscripts are God’s revelation of Himself, His will, and His gift of salvation for all to hear, accept, and follow. Read and reread, copied and recopied, and passed down through the ages, those epistles have been protected by God—every trustworthy word from the originals to what we have today.

God is sovereign, and every detail involving the preservation of those scrolls was under His care, as was the salvation and selection of the godly mailman who would deliver them. God's truth was placed in the hands of an ordinary man whose diligence and care provided an opportunity for the Word to be accurately communicated on Earth for thousands of years to come.

Many who follow Christ aspire to follow in the footsteps of Abraham, Moses, David, Paul, and other great leaders whom God used. But how many aspire to be a Tychicus, willing to minister behind the scenes in God’s unfolding drama of redemption?

“God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints. Do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Heb. 6:10, 12).

We serve a God who uses ordinary people in extraordinary ways; and He will use us too—as long as we make ourselves available to Him.

**Toward the end of Paul’s second and final imprisonment in Rome, some of his companions forsook him or moved to other areas of ministry.**

_by Clarence Johnson_,

national ministries specialist and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry
ISRAEL TO HELP FRENCH JEWS MAKE ALIYAH

In response to the increasing anti-Semitic attacks in France, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has instructed Diaspora Affairs and Education Minister Naftali Bennett to formulate a plan to increase Jewish immigration to Israel from France, JNS.org has reported.

“There are 200,000 Jews in France who want to make Aliyah [immigrate] to Israel, and all of the state systems are just unprepared for it. These people are Zionists, they are moral, they are lovers of the Jewish people, and it is our moral obligation to help them,” Bennett said.

According to French police, one out of every three race-based crimes reported in 2016 was committed against Jewish people, even though they comprise less than 1 percent of France’s population. And recently, French authorities discovered anti-Semitic vandalism on tombstones in the Jewish cemetery of Herrlisheim in northeastern France. The vandals tagged several tombs with swastikas and wrote inscriptions on the cemetery walls, such as “Crif=Zog” or “88,” a formula used by neo-Nazi groups to designate Hitler.

A Diaspora Ministry report on global anti-Semitism published in January 2018 called Muslim immigrants in Europe “a major risk factor to the Jewish communities of western Europe,” claiming more than half of all immigrants in Western Europe hold anti-Semitic views.

Similarly, the results of a recent European Union online survey of more than 16,000 Jews in 12 European countries revealed that nearly 90 percent of them feel anti-Semitism has increased in their home nations over the past five years, and almost 30 percent said they have been harassed at least once in the past year. Eighty-five percent rated anti-Semitism as the biggest social problem in their home countries, and 38 percent have considered emigrating because they don’t feel safe.

Bennett plans to create a master plan for increasing Aliyah among French Jews and will present it to the ministerial committee that deals with Aliyah and absorption.

From news sources

ISRAELI DRUZE, MUSLIM, CHRISTIAN LEADERS DEFEND ISRAEL AT HUMAN RIGHTS CONFERENCE

Israeli Christian, Muslim, and Druze minority leaders advocated for Israel as a beacon of light for human rights at the recent sixth annual Zionist Conference for Human Rights held in Tel Aviv on international Human Rights Day.

“There is no country that is more just than Israel,” said Capt. Shadi Halul, chairman of the Christian Israel Defense Forces Officers Forum. “[Israel] provides full and equal rights to all of its citizens. As a minority, I can testify to all the horrors that Christians experienced and continue to experience in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Egypt. But in Israel, we live freely in peace.”

Muslim social activist Kazim Khalilieh, who presents pro-Israel lectures around the world, discussed the difficulties of advocating for Israel as a member of the Muslim community.

“It’s not easy to go against the current,” said Khalilieh. “Two years ago, my parents stopped talking to me because of my support for Israel. But that is who I am; I need to stand up for the truth.”

Druze attorney and activist Hazar Gadben added, “All the radical-left Jews who slander and demonize Israel need to wake up and understand that if they were the minority in Israel, they would go back to being ‘Jews with big noses’ and would be oppressed to no end.”

The annual conference aims to underscore the unbreakable connection between Zionism and human rights and to counter those who use the call of human rights to slander and delegitimize Israel.

The conference awarded Im Tirtzu’s Zionist Prize for Human Rights to social activist and bereaved father Boaz Kokia, whose son Ron was murdered in 2017 in a terror attack, and to Rabbi Arie Levy, the founder of Rescuers Without Borders, which provides medical assistance to those in need throughout the world.

JNS.org
**U.S. CONGRESS PASSES BILL TO SANCTION HAMAS, HEZBOLLAH**

After the United Nations’ decision not to pass a resolution condemning Hamas as a terror group, both the U.S. House and the Senate passed a bipartisan bill calling for the sanctioning of terrorist organizations, such as Hamas and Hezbollah, that use human shields in war.

The Sanctioning the Use of Civilians as Defenseless Shields Act mandates the president to impose sanctions on any entity that “knowing and materially supports, orders, controls, directs, or otherwise engages in” the exercise of human shields.

“The international community has failed to hold these groups accountable, and . . . the United Nations [has] refused to pass a nonbinding resolution condemning Hamas,” Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) said. “The United States is sending a message that it will not turn a blind eye to terrorist war crimes the way the United Nations does [and] that those who use civilians as human shields . . . will be held accountable.”

**LATIN AMERICA COMPLETES FIRST-EVER DIRECT FLIGHT TO ISRAEL**

In response to increased Latin American tourism to Israel, LATAM Airlines recently completed the first-ever direct flight from Latin America to Israel. This new route from Santiago, Chile, to Ben Gurion International Airport outside Tel Aviv serves as the sole direct route from Latin America to Israel and functions once a day on Sundays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays.

“The arrival in Israel of LATAM Airlines—one of the largest in South America—is a breakthrough in flight connections,” said Israeli Tourism Minister Yariv Levin. From January to November of last year, 146,000 tourists traveled from Latin America to Israel—a 62 percent increase compared to 2016, according to Israel’s Tourism Ministry.

**UC BANS FACULTY SUPPORT FOR BDS**

The University of California has become the first institution of higher education to condemn faculty support for the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement, a Palestinian-led campaign against Israeli businesses and universities.

“As chancellors of the University of California campuses, we write to reaffirm our long-standing opposition to an academic boycott of Israeli academic institutions and/or individual scholars,” the school’s 10 chancellors said in a statement. “We believe a boycott of this sort poses a direct and serious threat to the academic freedom of our students and faculty.”

Last year, several U.S. professors came under fire for their refusal to write letters of recommendation for Jewish students seeking to study in Israel, citing academic boycotts of Israel.

**NEW ISRAEL-JORDAN PIPELINE TO OPERATE LATE THIS YEAR**

Israel expects its new natural-gas pipeline running from Israel to Jordan to begin official operations late this year. Lauded as a “boost for peace,” the pipeline will allow Israeli gas to be pumped into Jordan and potentially to other Arab countries in the region.

“The work aims to double the length of an existing pipeline running inside Israel along its border with Jordan and to add a new line running directly through the countries’ mutual border. “We are in the advanced stages of laying the Israel-Jordan natural-gas pipeline,” said Israel’s Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz. “This is a significant link between Israel’s energy infrastructure and that of the Arab world, and it has great value in terms of strengthening the axis of peace in the Middle East.”

**GAZA CONFERENCE: JEWS ARE “EVIL CREATURES”**

A Palestinian girl called Jews “wild apes,” “miserable pigs,” and “evil creatures” at a recent conference in Gaza for the International Day of Solidarity With the Palestinian People.

“Oh sons of Zion, the most evil of creatures, oh you wild apes, you miserable pigs—Jerusalem is not your [land]. Jerusalem rejects you. Jerusalem spits out your filth . . . . Jerusalem, you dirty people, is pure and clean. I do not fear the rifle. As long as I have my heart, my Koran, and my city, as long as I have my arm and my stones, and as long as I am free, I will not sell out the Palestinian cause,” the girl recited.

Al-Jazeera TV aired the conference.

**FLORIDA GOVERNOR CONDEMNS AIRBNB’S JEWISH DISCRIMINATION**

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis recently promised to take strong action against Airbnb for its decision to remove all Jewish listings from its site in Judea and Samaria over what the company alleged as “Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank that are at the core of the dispute between Israelis and Palestinians.”

“They delisted all Jewish listings in the West Bank,” said DeSantis. “They do not treat anybody else in the entire world like this. It’s only targeted to the Jewish community.”

The governor’s decision followed the Florida town of Surfside’s condemnation of Airbnb for violating its agreement with the town to prohibit discriminatory boycotts. Airbnb is a private company that provides an online service through which people can book lodging around the world.
Many times I try to speak to my Jewish people about how the Scriptures teach God has chosen Israel to be a light to the nations, bringing the Good News about the one true God to the ends of the earth. But many of the people I speak to do not know the truth about the Lord.

Recently, some Orthodox Jewish men overheard me talking about the Holy Spirit. They began to shout, “You! You! You are speaking about this Man!” (Orthodox Jews refer to Jesus as “this Man.”)

“The Bible talks about the Holy Spirit,” I told them. But they do not read the Bible; they read many commentaries written by men.

“Can you show me where it is written in the Bible about the Holy Spirit?” one asked. This was not the first time I was asked such a question. Because the man who asked was so sure he was righteous, I gave him my Bible and asked him to read Ezekiel 18:31–32: “Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,’ says the Lord God. “Therefore turn and live!”

After he read the passage, I told him, “Have a good look. Is this the true Bible?” “Yes,” he replied.

“Then continue reading,” I told him. I showed him Ezekiel 36:26–29:

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God. I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. I will call for the grain and

by Zvi Kalisher
multiply it, and bring no famine upon you.

The men had never seen this passage before. When Jewish people do arrive at this passage, they never receive an adequate explanation of its reference to the Holy Spirit, so they do not know the truth about the Lord.

“Why have you come to talk to us about the Holy Spirit?” one asked.

“Because you are so far away from the truth,” I said. “Therefore I came to tell you what the Bible says about the Holy Spirit. I did not come to tell you the many fictitious stories you have been hearing for years from your teachers. Ezekiel 33:7–11 says God has given me the obligation to share the truth with you from His Word.”

Every time I mentioned another verse from the Bible, they were eager to read it. They had so many questions about the Holy Spirit. “Do you respect what King David said?” I asked them.

“We respect him a great deal,” one answered.

So I turned to Psalm 51, written by King David, and asked them to read it: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me” (vv. 10–11).

Then another one of their Orthodox friends walked over and challenged me. “Do you really think this Man is written about in the Bible?” he asked.

“You must not take my word for it,” I told him. “Read the Bible yourself and find the passages your teachers hide from you.” I then showed him Isaiah 44:3–9. “Why are you so afraid of what is written in the Bible about the Holy Spirit of God?” I asked him.

“You know, many Christians use this passage about the Holy Spirit to tell us about this Man you call Yeshua. You have given me much to think about. Tomorrow I will bring this before our rabbis. Then we can continue our discussion,” he said.

The other Orthodox men were surprised the man they thought would shut down my arguments had nothing more to say to me.

—The Friends of Israel Archives, June 2004
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